

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please CANCEL claims 12-15 without prejudice to or disclaimer of the recited subject matter.

Please AMEND claims 1-3 and 5-11, as follows. For the Examiner's convenience, all pending claims are reproduced below:

1. (Currently Amended) An exposure apparatus having an illuminating optics unit for irradiating a reticle, on which a predetermined pattern has been formed, with exposing light emitted from an exposing exposure light source, a reticle stage on which the reticle is placed, a projection optics unit for projecting the predetermined pattern of the reticle onto a substrate, and a substrate stage on which the substrate is placed, said apparatus comprising:

at least one chamber for internally accommodating the illuminating optics unit, the reticle stage, the projection optics unit and the substrate stage;

first pressure control means for making a value of pressure inside ~~the projection optics unit~~ said at least one chamber higher than a value of pressure outside ~~the~~ said at least one chamber; and

first correction means for correcting optical characteristics of the projection optics unit, by performing at least one of (i) moving an adjustment unit for adjusting the optical characteristics of the projection optics unit and (ii) shifting a wavelength of the exposing light, in accordance with a the value of the pressure inside ~~the projection optics unit~~ said at least one chamber.

2. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the reticle is irradiated with exposing light, which has been emitted by the exposing exposure light source, via the illuminating optics unit, the predetermined pattern that has been formed on the reticle is projected onto the substrate via the projection optics unit to expose the substrate to the pattern, and the exposing light has an optical path, the entirety of which is sealed within said at least one chamber, said apparatus further comprising:

second pressure control means for making the value of the pressure inside said at least one chamber higher than the value of the pressure outside said at least one chamber; and

second correction means for correcting optical characteristics of the projection optics unit in accordance with a the value of the pressure inside said at least one chamber.

3. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the interior of said at least one chamber is filled with inert gas.

4. (Previously Amended) The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the inert gas is selected from the group consisting of nitrogen gas, helium gas and a mixed gas of nitrogen gas and helium gas.

5. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein control is performed in such a manner that the value of the pressure inside the projection optics unit said at least one

chamber is made higher, by a fixed amount, than the value of the pressure outside the projection optics unit said at least one chamber.

6. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the value of the pressure inside said at least one chamber is made constant.

7. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a first pressure sensor for sensing the value of the pressure inside the projection optics unit said at least one chamber and a second pressure sensor for sensing the value of the pressure outside the projection optics unit said at least one chamber.

8. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said first correction means estimates an amount of change in optical characteristics of said the projection optics unit based upon an index of refraction, which varies in accordance with the value of the pressure inside said projection optics unit at least one chamber, and corrects the optical characteristics of said the projection optics unit based upon the estimated amount of a change in the optical characteristics of said the projection optics unit.

9. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a substrate load-lock chamber in the vicinity of said the substrate stage and a reticle load-lock chamber in the vicinity of said the reticle stage.

10. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said the illuminating optics unit, said the reticle stage, said the projection optics unit and said the substrate stage are accommodated in respective ones of separate chambers.

11. (Currently Amended) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said the illuminating optics unit, said the reticle stage, said the projection optics unit and said the substrate stage are accommodated in at least two separate chambers.

12-15. (Cancelled)